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SUBJECT: ANTI-CUBAN EMBARGO RESOLUTION PASSES SERBIA'S PARLIAMENT

Summary

1. (U) The Serbian Parliament overwhelmingly approved a declaration condemning sanctions against Cuba, in principle. The text of the declaration reflects the vigorous debate between the democratic and radical MPs that resulted in only one explicit mention of the United States. While Serbia has voted before in the UN against USG Cuba sanctions policy, this is the first time that parliament has adopted a position on the matter. Recent trade and travel between Cuba and Serbia suggest a deepening relationship. Serbia's own experience on the wrong side of sanctions explains the nearly unanimous support for this declaration, but the declaration may be nothing more than a cheap shot at the USG in the midst of Kosovo commotion. End Summary.

Declaration Condemns Sanctions, in Principle

2. (U) Serbia's Parliament on November 5 adopted a declaration "on the Necessity of Ending the Sanctions and Isolation of the Republic of Cuba." The Radical-sponsored declaration won 209 of 250 votes, with most of the remaining members of parliament absent or abstaining. Approximately 10 MPs from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the League of Vojvodina Social Democrats (LSV) opposed the declaration (an exact count of nays was not available).

3. (U) The text declares Serbia's solidarity with the people of Cuba "who have been living for decades in conditions established by economic blockade and isolation" and opposes any policy that "imposes force, sanctions, or isolation." The text explicitly affirms Serbia's support of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution against the U.S. embargo of Cuba, but otherwise does not mention the United States. The full text of the declaration appears in paragraph 9.

A Matter of Principle or Spite?

4. (U) The Radical Party (SRS) introduced the declaration, which parliament nearly unanimously accepted for consideration on October 11. Only LDP MPs objected to putting the item on the legislative agenda. The Radicals' sharply-worded text had accused the United States of leading an economic war against Cuba, which amounted to a genocidal crime and which had hindered the social, economic, political, and democratic development of Cuban society. The LDP reportedly attempted, unsuccessfully, to insert language condemning the government of Cuba for undemocratic practices. While supporting in principle the UNGA resolution, LDP questioned why the parliament should, for the first time, adopt its own declaration. LDP MPs accused the SRS of introducing the declaration on orders from Russia and Cuba, in retaliation against the United States because of Kosovo. SRS accused LDP of acting under orders of the U.S. Embassy.

5. (U) The ruling coalition secured the wording of the final text, in large part thanks to Democratic Party (DS) and G-17 MPs who

wanted to focus only on condemning sanctions. Speaker of Parliament, Oliver Dulic of DS, had previously told poloff that DS would oppose the declaration if the party was unsuccessful in removing the criticism of the United States.

#### Closer Relations with Cuba?

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¶6. (U) Other recent activity signals development of Serbia's ties to Cuba. Serbia's Minister of Agriculture, Slobodan Milosavljevic (DS), announced in Belgrade on November 5 an agreement to export \$50 million of agricultural products to Cuba as part of a plan to develop the countries' economic cooperation. Milosavljevic had recently returned from a trip to Cuba, with other officials and Serbian executives, for the second meeting of the Non-Aligned Business Forum, November 2 and 3. Current imports to Serbia from Cuba consist of approximately \$200,000 of cigars, and Serbia's exports to Cuba are negligible.

¶7. (U) Cuba has apparently captured the interest of parliamentarians. Approximately 11% (29 of 250) of Serbian parliamentarians applied for inclusion in the nascent Cuba Friendship Group, putting this group only second to the Russian Friendship Group in popularity. (The United States pulled 25 applicants.)

#### Declaration Text

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¶8. (U) Following in unofficial translation of the Declaration text:

Begin Text: Declaration of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia on Necessity of Ending Sanctions and Isolation of the Republic of Cuba:

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Proceeding from the fact that the economic sanctions are affecting the population and leaving permanent devastating consequences to the economy, social situation, and health of the citizens of the countries exposed to international sanctions;

Acknowledging the internationally recognized principles of tolerance, cooperation, peaceful resolution of problems without pressure and through dialogue and mutual consideration;

Having regard to the fact that Serbia itself has also suffered economic sanctions imposed by the international community:

-- The National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia expresses its full solidarity with the people of the Republic of Cuba who have been living for several decades in conditions set by economic blockade and isolation.

-- The National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia opposes any application of the policy of force, sanctions, and isolation to countries, seeing that it consequently always leads to the suffering of the population.

-- The National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia supports the efforts of the Republic of Cuba aimed at lifting of the blockade and isolation and establishing full cooperation with the world.

-- The National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia fully supports the Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly on necessity of ending the economic, commercial, and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.

End Text of Declaration.

#### Comment

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¶9. (SBU) The Radical-led declaration represents the considerable political strength the party still enjoys in Serbia. As

right-minded Democratic Party and even Democratic Party of Serbia officials assure embassy officials that Serbia wants to move quickly toward European integration, the unproductive and overbearing acts of the parliament portray Serbs more as unreconstructed Cominformists. The waste of time spent on a resolution meaningless to the Serb public agenda also shows the Radicals' intent to use their parliamentary superiority to hijack the significant domestic agenda for political posturing. The parliament remains mostly an unformed institution in need of serious reform. The lack of ability of rational-minded parliamentarians to prevent another "crazy Serb" act also represents the serious work the serious parties must do to build their electoral constituencies and educate the public. End Comment.

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